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Mat Med

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Serpentine

An Essay on the practical
application of *Serpentine*
to the cure of diseases, by
Landon C. Rives, of
Virginia.

Mrs. Sargis
Landon C. Rives

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On the application of the



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On the application of turpentine
to the cure of diseases—

Resin turpentine is an exudation from a tree, the *Pinus Larix* of Linnaeus. It is thick and tenacious, semi-pellucid, of a pale yellowish colour, a peculiar odour & a better pungent taste. By distillation with the addition of a little water it affords abundantly an essential oil which is light, volatile and inflammable.

It is this oil, designated by the title of *Oleum terebinthinae*, which is most commonly used in medicine; and perhaps few articles of the materia medica have been ever consecrated to a greater variety of purposes in the management of diseases. In one dose it acts as a diuretic, in another as an anthelmintic or purgative, and when applied externally it is an active rubefacient; but its character is more particularly that of a stimulant specifically directed to the urinary organs. Endowed with such divi-

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sified powers, we should readily imagine that the turpentine was appropriated to the cure of a large circle of diseases; nor shall we have any cause to change this opinion if we consult the late medical journals of this country or of Europe. To bring under one view the different diseases to which it has been applied, to estimate its value in each, and as far as practicable, to explain its *modus operandi*, are the objects of this essay.

When taken internally, the spirits of turpentine is a most active and pervading stimulant, and hence is well adapted to all the low stages of disease, when the indication is to support the tone and strength of the system. Dr. Chapman bears testimony to its value in the sinking condition of the winter epidemic, and we are told upon the same

Note.

By Dr. Chapman I have been told since the writing of this essay that he has understood that Dr. Physick used the turpentine very freely in one case, at least, of yellow fever and with great success so early as the year 1798 or 1799. Dr. Physick may therefore be regarded as the author of the practice which I have incorrectly imputed to the Physicians of the City Hospital -

authority, that it is not less suited to the advanced stages of genuine typhus fever. In all the atonic shapes of disease, whether primary, or subsequently induced, the turpentine, I am persuaded, will prove a most valuable remedy.

In the year 1798 turpentine was prescribed by Dr. Physick in small doses to check the vomitings incident to yellow fever, and the practice was adopted by many of the medical men of this city upon his authority. But during the last season it was elevated to a much higher rank in the management of this disease. No longer regarded merely as a remedy to allay an urgent symptom it became the principal weapon with which the disease itself was combated.

I shall not stop to enquire into the pathology of yellow fever. The character-

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istic phenomena of the disease and dissections
demonstrate it to be a case of highly ag-
gravated gastric inflammation. So well
indeed does this point appear to be ascer-
tained that it would be an unpardon-
able degree of scepticism to doubt it.
Influenced therefore as well by this view
of the disease, as by the known efficacy
of turpentine when applied to external
inflammations produced by burns &c, the
Physicians of the City Hospital early
resorted to its use in all the cases which
came under their care during the last
season. I regret that I cannot illustrate
the value of the practice by a reference
to the cases, but as I have not been able
to obtain a record of them, I must con-
tent myself with a very abridged state-
ment of the general results, without no-
ticing the effects of the medicine upon

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the different functions of the body. It appears in the first place, that the *Cicum ter-
rebinthina* was the medicine principally
employed and that it was administered
in large and repeated doses. Secondly
that it was prescribed both as a diffusible
stimulant, and with a view of counter-
acting inflammation. Thirdly that it
was given, for the most part, on the second
or third day of the disease after the more
decided inflammatory symptoms had
abated, but in some cases from the com-
mencement of the malady and with
equal advantage. and lastly as the re-
sult of this practice, it appears that a
greater proportion recovered than under
plan of treatment heretofore recommen-
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The close resemblance between yellow
fever and Plague, would induce us to be-

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lieve that turpentine might be advantageously employed in the latter disease. And this opinion, the legitimate offspring of analogical reasoning, is fully confirmed by recent experience. On the authority of Dr Chapman, I am enabled to state that Dr A. B. Faulkner, Physician to the British forces in Malta, in his late account of the Plague in that Island, most positively asserts that no treatment was found so successful in the disease as 'Cold affusion and turpentine'.

Not many years ago Dr Brennan of Dublin introduced to the notice of the Profession, the utility of turpentine in the treatment of Puerperal fever. His plan is to give it in large doses internally and frequently repeated, and to apply cloths soaked in it to the abdomen so as to produce superficial inflammation. He

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adopts this practice from the very commencement of the disease, and if his statement is worthy of credit with the most satisfactory results. I confess, however, notwithstanding the confident tone in which Dr. Brenar speaks of this medicine in the case before us, that I should not be disposed to imitate his practice. After the depleting remedies have been used as far as the strength of the patient will permit, I can readily conceive that the turpentine may be usefully resorted to, as well to sustain the system, as to counteract peritoneal inflammation where it exists. The indiscriminate application of turpentine to all cases of purpuræ fever and to all its stages, I should presume, would certainly be unjustifiable.

In Gastritis, Peritonitis and Enteritis our medicine has been advantageously

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employed. The Professor of the practice in this University bears testimony to its utility in each of these diseases - It is only however in their advanced stages, that he resorts to its use - When a vomiting of black matter and the other symptoms of approaching gangrene arise, the turpentine will frequently display valuable powers by arresting the inflammation and sustaining the sinking strength of the patient -

In the advanced stages of dysentery and Cholera Infantum, after the inflammatory stage of the complaint has passed away, much good may be expected from the administration of turpentine - And in mucous diarrhoea it is a useful remedy - In the last disease it is the practice of Dr. Chapman to give the common resin in ten grain doses.

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prescribed in some of the diseases apper-
taining to the class Neurosis. To the in-
terpreting talents of the American faculty
we owe its introduction into the treat-
ment of Epilepsy. Long before the prac-
tice was known in Europe Dr. Chapman
employed the medicine extensively in
numerous cases which were presented
to him in the course of his public prac-
tice in the Alms house of this city, and
with occasional benefit, but upon the
whole, the Professor is not aware that he
has ever accomplished much by the
remedy. In the fifth volume of the me-
dical transactions of London, some cases
of Epilepsy are detailed by Drs. Latham
and Young and in the Edinburgh medical re-
view others are recited by Dr. C. Percival
in which cures were effected by the in-
ternal exhibition of turpentine. The results

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of medical experience upon the whole is, that in most cases, it is entirely unproductive of any good, in some it has proven beneficial and in a few only effected radical cures. Where epilepsy depends upon worms, as it frequently does in children, the greatest benefit may be anticipated from turpentine; and even in cases dependant upon nervous excitement arising from irritation in any part of the body unconnected with a disorganized structure of the brain, our medicine is not altogether unpromising. By its stimulant property it may calm nervous irritability and thus arrest the disease.

In tetanus turpentine has been also employed, and there are not wanting well authenticated cases of its having accomplished cures. Dr Phillips

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of Durham in England relates in the
6th. volume of the Medico-Chirurgical
transactions of London, the history of a
case in which he succeeded by this re-
-medy. The patient was a lady of great
nervous irritability. She had been treated
ineffectually for several days by purges
and other remedies, when it occurred to
Dr. Phillips to give her the Turbithinate
infusion. This produced such an effect
that her bow suddenly fell, and she was
enabled in a few minutes to thank the
Doctor for the prompt relief he had
afforded her. I have not recited this
case however from a belief that the
remedy will be generally thus effectual,
but from a persuasion that nothing is
wholly undeserving of notice which has
ever accomplished any good in a disease
that not uncommonly resists the best

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directed efforts of medical skill.

I come now to the consideration of turpentine as an anthelmintic and undoubtedly it deserves to stand at the head of this class of medicines. The history of its introduction into the treatment of tania would afford a striking illustration of how much medicine is indebted to accident for its most valuable remedies. But it would be foreign to my purpose to notice any accounts of the article while its establishment in regular practice. Dr Fenwick of England was the first physician to call the attention of the Profession to the utility of turpentine in cases of tania; but since that time numerous experiments have been made with the medicine both in Europe and in this country with the most favourable results. The dose is

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one to two ounces and even in the latter quantity it rarely produces any unpleasant consequences - Giddings, slight head ache, thirst and other febrile symptoms occasionally supervene, but they soon pass away; and contrary to what might be anticipated stranguery is not so apt to be produced by large as by smaller doses - The action of turpentine as a vermifuge can only be accounted for by supposing that it exerts a poisonous influence upon the worm, which it first destroys & then removes by its purgative operation - This opinion, plausible in itself, will be confirmed if we recollect that in all the cases detailed by Dr. Tenevick (and they are numerous) the most drastic purgatives had been ineffectually used; and that after the exhibition of turpentine the animal

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or very languid state.

The efficacy of turpentine in Felvia
has led to its employment in the less
intractable species of worms - a host
of practitioners might be adduced to
attest its value in each, but it would
be an unnecessary degree of minute-
ness to enter into such details - The
power which can defeat a giant is
surely adequate to crush a pigmy -

As an antilithic the spirits of turpentine
is perhaps the best with which we are
acquainted - Dr. Physick thinks that
it is decidedly entitled to this dis-
tinction - It operates most probably
by correcting the mucous discharge
from the ureters or bladder with
which lithic complaints are usually
connected -

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In Dropsy the turpentine has been used but with very equivocal results. As a diuretic it has accomplished much more in Strangury from blisters, in Gleet and in Leucorrhœa -

In Chronic Rheumatism our medicine has been beneficially employed. During the Peninsular war when the troops of Great Britain were much exposed and this disease prevailed in consequence to a very great extent, many cases are reported to have been cured by the free exhibition of turpentine after all the usual remedies had entirely failed -

To Gout in the stomach and to all the spasmodic affections of the alimentary canal turpentine is well suited. In flatulent colic, it is a favorite prescription of Dr. DeWies to

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combine the oils of mint and turpentine; & this combination, he thinks, is well suited to all colics of a periodical character.

In many of the painful affections dependent upon dyspepsia, such as Pyrosis and Gastrodynia, our medicine will frequently afford relief. To all obstinate cases of constipation Dr. Chapman thinks the union of turpentine & castor oil, in the proportion of 1℥ of the former to 1℥ of the latter is well adapted, no purge being more active.

As an infection in obstructed bowels Dr. Cullen recommends the Turbithinate. It is a very powerful & certain laxative and is usually prepared by blending an ounce of turpentine with the yolks of eggs & mixing it with mucilage of Gum arabic or flax seed.

As a rubefacient the Oleum Turbithinae

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is very active and hence promises utility in all cases where it is advisable to produce superficial inflammation or where a counter-irritant is demanded. In rheumatism, in sprains and swellings of the joints, in affections of the throat and in pleurodynia it is an important local application.

Mixed with basilicon ointment turpentine constitutes one of the best and most liniment (syrings to burns, but care must be taken in applying it, as, if it touches the healthy skin, it is extremely irritating.

I might even go on still to enumerate other minor affections in which our medicine has been employed; But it would be useless to swell this essay by such minute details - Enough, I am sure, has been

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already said, to demonstrate the great
importance of turpentine as a re-
medy, & to point to the principles
which should govern us in its ap-
plication to the cure of disease.

